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THE ROLE OF THE HUMANITIES IN THE CURRICULUM.

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AT A TIME WHEN HUMANITIES COURSES ARE UNDERGOING REEVALUATION AND DEVELOPMENT, THEY MUST NOT BE SUFFOCATED BY INCORPORATING INTO THEM TOO MANY LITERARY WORKS AND TOO MANY APPROACHES. SELECTION OF WORKS IS OF PARAMOUNT IMPORTANCE, AND PERHAPS THE BEST PRINCIPLE UPON WHICH TO BASE SELECTION IS ONE WHICH ENCOURAGES "ENLIGHTENED CHERISHING"--THE COMMITMENT OF THE INDIVIDUAL TO CERTAIN VALUES AND TO THE STANDARDS BY WHICH HE JUSTIFIES HIS COMMITMENT. THE HUMANITIES COURSE CAN OFFER TO THE STUDENT, FOR STUDY AND POSSIBLE EMULATION, THE BEST EXEMPLARS OF THE HUMAN IDEAL. IN CHOOSING MATERIALS AND AN APPROACH, SCHOOLS MUST KEEP IN MIND THAT HABITS OF ENLIGHTENED CHERISHING TAKE TIME TO ESTABLISH, AND THAT IT IS MORE EFFECTIVE TO CONCENTRATE ON A FEW WORKS WHICH HAVE THE GREATEST POTENTIAL FOR INTERESTING THE STUDENT AND DEMONSTRATING THE MEANING OF THE HUMAN QUEST FOR HUMANITY. BY CONCENTRATING ON THOSE WORKS WITH GREAT ARTISITC MERIT, THE APPROACH USED IN TEACHING CAN BE THAT OF AESTHETIC ANALYSIS, WHICH TEACHES STUDENTS TO READ KNOWINGLY AND INTELLIGENTLY AND TO RESPOND RATIONALLY AND IMAGINATIVELY. (THIS ADDRESS WAS DELIVERED AT THE CONFERENCE FOR SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS, CONDUCTED BY THE NEW YORK STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION, JULY 1966, AND IS REPRINTED IN "JOURNAL OF AESTHETIC EDUCATION," VOL. 1 (AUTUMN 1966), 17-27.) (DL)

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*The Role of the Humanities in the Curriculum**

HARRY S. BROUDY

I do not know how many junior and senior high schools now have or are planning to have a humanities program or course. Doubtless, somebody can cite a figure, but if it were ever accurate, it was so only for a moment, because program development in American public schools is a luxuriant rather than a systematic growth. Programs are born, publicized, adopted, and fade away, but nobody, taking the country as a whole, really knows why, when, and where. Nevertheless, the impression is strong, and there is some evidence to support it, that there is much activity in the humanities field, and there is little doubt that the recent establishment of a National Foundation for the Arts and Humanities will stimulate it even more.

Curriculum change in our public schools is not only indefinite in quantity but bewilderingly varied as to form. This is almost inevitable because the common method for developing a program is to have it done by a large representative committee. This body tries to find out what others everywhere are doing, pools all plausible suggestions, and finally makes some kind of selection from them.

As might be expected, no two humanities programs agree fully on content, approach, or method of instruction. Some include all the fine arts, some insist on history, some on philosophy, and some on religion. Some propose to organize the material by periods, some by styles, some

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by themes. Some intend to utilize teaching teams; some propose to teach all the arts together; some combine all approaches, methods, and contents.

PROBLEM OF SELECTION

There is nothing intrinsically wrong with this lush variety, but often it threatens to choke the program to death. To be sure, the suffocation would be from a surfeit of goodies that the committee insists on stuffing into the program, but suffocation is just as fatal as when caused by any other means. And what little life remains in the patient after the committee is through stuffing it may be snuffed out altogether by an attempt to crowd a half dozen different approaches and methods of instruction into it.

In ancient days the humanities referred to the literature of Greece and Rome,[1] and in the schools only a small selection of classic works were studied. Moreover, a fairly standard way of teaching them was developed as early as 166 B.C. that was used for a long time thereafter.[2]

Today, when we make up a program of the humanities, there are 20 centuries of western civilization alone to be surveyed for possible classics, not only in literature, but in every art. In addition, there is all of contemporary production to consider, so that the danger of suffocation is very genuine indeed.

In these circumstances the principles of selection are everything.

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[1] "Humanities" as meaning arts and letters was used by Cicero and other admirers of Greek culture to refer to the total educational process or the formation of man according to a conscious ideal. (cf. Werner Jaeger, *The Greeks and the Education of Man* (Annandale-on-Hudson, New York: Bard College, 1953), pp. 4-5.

[2] By Dionysius of Thrace who divided the teaching of a work of literature into steps. For a brief description see H. S. Broudy and John Palmer, *Exemplars of Teaching Method* (Chicago: Rand McNally & Co., 1965), p. 23.

As to the extent of the classical studies in literature, the curriculum of the *Gymnasium* of Johann Sturm in Strasbourg in 1565 listed the following works:

Sixth class (11-12 years) — Cicero's longer letters, some of Terence, selections from Aesop, Bishop Ambrose, Martial, and Horace.

Fifth class (12-13 years) — Cicero's *Cato* and *Laelis*, *Eclogues* of Vergil, and Pauline Epistles in Greek.

Fourth class (13-14 years) — More of Cicero's letters, part of *Adelphi* of Terence, and epistles and satires of Horace.

Third class (14-15 years) — More of Cicero's letters, *Menippus* of Lucian, sixth book of Vergil's *Aeneid*, first book of *Iliad* or *Odyssey* in Greek as well as some of Demosthenes' speeches, odes of Pindar and Horace; some comedies of Terence and Plautus acted out.

Second class (15-16 years) — Interpretation of Greek poets and orators; acted out some of the comedies and tragedies of Aristophanes, Euripides or Sophocles, more Cicero, Demosthenes, and *Iliad*.

First class (16-17 years) — Vergil, Homer, Thucydides, Sallust, and Epistles of St. Paul.

Such principles depend, in turn, on the purposes the humanities course is to serve, a point on which there may be divergent views. The situation is further complicated by the fact that even though a school may not list a course called the humanities, it may offer instruction that is supposed to achieve the purposes attributed to the humanities, for example, courses in literature, art, history of ideas, etc. If this is the case — and usually it is — then the claim to curricular time and staff for an additional course becomes debatable; whether or not it is defensible will depend on the distinctiveness of the outcome claimed for the new course, and whether or not this unique outcome is worth pursuing. One significant alternative is to reorganize the existing offerings in literature, arts, history, etc., into a humanities course; another is to replace existing courses with a new one.

I do not know which proposal — adding a new course or reorganizing a number of existing ones — gives the administrator more sleepless nights, but this consideration, cogent as it may be, is less important than the possibility that after all the agonizing reappraisals and reshufflings, after all the abrasive anxieties that such reorganizations or innovations inevitably occasion, things may in a year or two settle back into the very moulds from which they emerged.

We need, therefore, principles of selection of materials and approach that will not jeopardize the humanities program by intolerable and unmanageable plenitude and a concept of the distinctive contribution of the program which will justify either a new course or the reorganization of existing courses.

Revival of the Humanities

The humanities taken in their broadest and most generous intent include works of art, literature, music, sculpture, architecture, history, and philosophy which depict the *human* ideal. This ideal is no more nor less than a conviction that man can transform his animal instincts into something worthy of being called "human," a transformation achieved by intelligence and imagination. By intelligence he can reflect on his experience and by imagination he can expand it, even to the point of changing its quality. Who but man, for example, could transmute feeding into dining and lust into romance? From this cultivation of intelligence and imagination emerges a value system in which some experience is judged to be better or higher than another, an understanding of why this is so, and an obligation to achieve the better and the higher at considerable, perhaps at all, costs.

One great ideal of humanity was worked out vividly and clearly in

the Greek poetry, drama, sculpture, architecture, and philosophy. The Romans were enchanted by it and perpetuated it. Since then in various renaissances, the ideal has been revived.[3]

Perhaps the renewed interest of schools in the humanities is a symptom for the need of another revival of this idea and ideal of *humanitas.* In our own time, as in the barbaric ages that prevailed in some parts of the world after the fall of Rome, the human style has become ragged and human self-confidence flags. There is a despair about transforming the crudity of raw animal impulse; there is an even greater despair about undoing the perversions of human nature by the misuse of intelligence and imagination.

We need not recount the already familiar bill of complaints. We are unable to distinguish riches from affluence, to find freedom in our efficiency, to find satisfaction in an age designed to maximize comfort and pleasure. The blessings of large-scale industry turn out to be breeders of great fears of great wars. In sum, we are unhappy not because we lack the ingredients for happiness, but because the ingredients don't add up to it.

Above all, middle-aged parents and policemen are baffled and frightened by their inability to reach the young. They talk of honesty, hard work, chastity, kindness, fair play as if the young must mean by these words what they themselves mean. The polite patience with which such talk is so often received dismays us even more than blatant and unkempt defiance. To the middle-aged generation it looks as if the world belongs to teen-agers bent on wrecking it and themselves.

What does it look like to the young? Who knows? Middle-agers cannot make it out from what teen-agers say, but like the animals who are reputed to be able to communicate with each other in mysterious ways, the young seem to communicate with each other so as not to let the "enemy" know what is really going on. We can only conjecture that to the young it looks as if the world belongs to the stupid, timid, and hypocritical middle-agers who talk about virtue because their glands are tired; who talk peace but wage war; who preach freedom and practice oppression.

In the search for the causes of our troubles some critics have blamed the dominance of science and technology in our culture. This dominance, they argue, has given us great power to achieve ends but not the wisdom to choose ends. The humanities, purporting to deal with values, that is, with the assessment of ends, are suggested as a counter

[3] Jaeger, *op. cit.*, pp. 16-17.

measure to the emphasis on science in both school and society. Hence the revival of the ancient feud between science and the humanities, a feud so well publicized in the recent remarks of C. P. Snow about the two cultures.

Scientists understandably do not like to be regarded as inhuman or their sciences as nonhuman. Knowledge is the human achievement par excellence, and science is our most reliable and useful kind of knowledge. Nor are scientists as men inhuman; they lead lives no worse than others and are as responsive to their fellows as the next man. Accordingly, some educators see no reason for excluding the sciences from the humanities. However admirable such hospitability may be, there is some justification for distinguishing humanistic from scientific studies.

Science *as* science is about a domain of objects, and the goal of science is to discover the laws that explain the behavior of these objects. The import of these objects for the human ideal is precisely what is *not* the concern of science as a science or the scientist as a scientist. Thus the truth about the laws of nuclear fission does not depend on the brotherhood of man or a belief in it. However, insofar as the former is important for the latter, nuclear physics becomes a humanistic concern. So the humanistic study of a science is possible, but such a study is no longer science; and the scientific study of humanity is possible, but it is then no longer humanistic.

Enlightened Cherishing

Now the activities of man that deliberately transmute knowledge, feeling, and imagination into actual or possible value commitments are the fine arts, history in its literary dimensions, and moral philosophy. Religion should be included except when it takes the human quest beyond the human boundaries, but insofar as religion is a human activity and deals with the human theme it belongs in the humanities. It is natural, therefore, to turn to the "value" studies or the humanities as a remedy for the troubles of our times. However, humanistic studies are and have always been in the curriculum, so why is a "new" course suggested? The reasons usually given are that some of these studies, e.g., the fine arts, are not given sufficient attention, or that some, e.g., literature, are not taught for the right outcomes, e.g., aesthetic or moral, or that certain items regarded as classics are not taught at all. It is to meet these deficiencies — real or alleged — that the humanities course is proposed as a remedy.

The humanities course, it is suggested, would deliberately devote itself to the human quest for the right answers to the questions about the good, the true, and the beautiful — about the life that is genuinely human. However, even the standard courses in literature and history claim they do this, so the humanities course must promise something more or different. I would suggest that the outcome we really expect from the humanities course be called enlightened cherishing. These two words encompass both the commitment of the individual to certain values and the standards by which he justifies the commitment. The humanities course will not give ready-made "right" answers to value questions, but properly taught and learned it could enlighten our cherishing by offering to the student exemplars of the human ideal for study and possible emulation. This, I take it, is what we mean by value *education* as opposed to value *training*, on the one hand, and to knowledge about values, on the other. The former produces cherishings that are not enlightened; the latter may not result in cherishing at all.

I believe that many of the courses now available in the high school curriculum are humanistic only in the sense that they give the student knowledge about cherishing. Many appreciation courses, survey courses in the history of civilization, most history courses, and not a few of the courses in literature have been accused of this fault. If this charge is well founded, then something other than this mode of instruction is justified either by new courses or reorganization of old ones that stress the shaping of taste.

However, the cherishing phase of schooling can be unenlightened. Teachers may be inculcating and rewarding preferences without being able to give reasons for them. B. F. Skinner, I am sure, could teach his pigeons to cherish Bach and Mozart in this way. Some, adopting the doctrine that there is no way of disputing rationally about tastes, preclude even the possibility of enlightened cherishing. Some reinforce certain preferences because they are approved by the dominant group in the society. Some are hypocrites professing to love what the critics say is good, but secretly preferring what the popular media extol. Others in the schools, fearful lest the emotional experience be marred by turning the intellect upon it, shy away from all talk of standards, of judgment, of connoisseurship. Still other devotees of the arts brand all efforts to teach art or music or sculpture for appreciation as misguided. There is only one way to teach art they say, and this is to try to make a painter or musician out of the pupil. If the learner is successful he becomes a performer, an artist; if not, he can use what little

he has learned to appreciate the performance of others. Those with talent perform and appreciate, those without just appreciate.[4]

If enlightened cherishing is the distinctive contribution of the humanities course to the outcomes of schooling, it should guide the choice of materials and approach so as not to lose this distinctiveness. Two strategic factors in the choice are (1) the fact that habits of enlightened cherishing take time to establish and (2) the presupposition that there are standards of cherishing which the school is willing to accept and use.

The time factor makes it imperative to keep the number of books, pictures, sculptures, buildings, dramas to be studied small. To avoid the danger of suffocation it would be well to concentrate for longer periods of time on fewer items of study. This means selecting items that pack the greatest potentialities for capturing the interest of the student and for displaying to the student the meaning of the human quest for humanity. Precisely because other courses in the curriculum provide for getting knowledge and for achieving certain skills, the humanities course need not worry lest some "items" be left out. One must reiterate this, because school people are obsessed by the fear of leaving something out that anyone on the committee thinks is important. A committee designing a humanities course would be well advised to have its members vie with each other to omit items rather than to include them.

It is desirable but not imperative for the humanities course not to duplicate too many items already being studied in established courses. For enlightened cherishing, works that are not in every anthology may be just as useful as some of the old standbys, but insofar as the humanities course is unique in spirit, duplication is not a serious problem.

The principle of parsimony should also be applied to the choice of an approach. Courses are now organized on the basis of recurrent themes such as freedom, creativity, search for God, etc.; on styles of art and literature, e.g., classic, baroque, modern; on historical periods, e.g., ancient, medieval, renaissance, etc.[5] In an eagerness to exploit the virtues of all the approaches, various combinations are tried. The objection to these is practical: the greater the number of approaches

[4] All of these variants can be found in any one of a clutch of symposia on the teaching of the arts. Typical is *A Seminar in Art Education for Research and Curriculum Development* which came out of Pennsylvania State University in 1966. The contributions cover everything from highly involved theory about what an artist does to such "helpful" suggestions as bringing in people who as artists will act as Pied Pipers and charm pupils into the "basic mystery of art" and let what may happen in the classroom.

[5] For samples of approaches, see the project materials now being developed by the New York State Department of Education and the Educational Research Council of Greater Cleveland.

the more complex the teaching becomes, and the greater the staff resistance. It is just about impossible to combine styles, themes, periods, and the various arts in any one course without driving the already apprehensive teacher to despair. It is better to pick one approach as dominant and allow the others to be woven in as opportunity permits, but not to worry overmuch if opportunity does not permit.

AESTHETIC EXEMPLARS

One way of simplifying the approach is to select works that clothe the great themes or ideas of the human quest in artistic form. Not all works of art display or celebrate ideas, but some works of great artistic merit do. The Greek tragedies and those of Shakespeare are familiar examples. They not only tell us about the human quest but seduce us into cherishing it. But some paintings, sculpture, and, to a lesser extent, music exert an analogous power over our cherishings even though they do not deal explicitly with ideas. In other words, the humanities course could limit itself to works of indisputable artistic excellence that display, illustrate, and celebrate the human quest. This would leave out most historical works and works of formal philosophy, but the ideas they express might still be among those celebrated by the works of art that have been selected for study.[6]

One advantage of such an approach is that it enables us to adopt a distinctive style of teaching the course, viz., that of aesthetic analysis.

Poems, novels, epics, myths, paintings, buildings, capture our attention and invite our participation by their formal structure, on the one hand, and by stimulating our imagination, on the other. To become enlightened in our cherishing is to learn to respond knowingly to these selected works of the imagination designed for the imagination: to look, listen, and think as the poet, the dramatist, the moral genius, the painter, and the architect looks, listens, and thinks.

These works of art, that form so large a part of the humanities, can be studied with respect to their sensuous properties, their techniques, their formal design, and their expressiveness. Each of the first three types of characteristics can be discerned, pointed to, and discussed. Given enough time to do these three things with a work of art, there is a fair chance that the fourth quality — expressiveness or meaning — may come through.

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[6] For further discussion of exemplars, see H. S. Broudy, *Building a Philosophy of Education* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1961), Chap. 13, and Broudy, B. Othanel Smith, and Joe R. Burnett, *Democracy and Excellence in American Secondary Education* (Chicago: Rand McNally & Co., 1964), Chap. 13.

Aesthetic analysis is formulable into a teaching method and can be applied to any art form; it is adaptable to various levels of learning readiness, and the results can, I believe, be evaluated with a fair amount of confidence. If well done and for a sufficient time, it should produce enlightened cherishing and a commitment to its importance.[7] This style of instruction can be combined with any of the packagings mentioned earlier, but it promises the most solid results if the number of items studied is kept small and their quality high.

Authority

Sooner or later, if the selection of content is to be justified, the selectors will have to appeal to authority.

Now all authority rests upon the willingness to believe that some propositions are true and some things are good because somebody's word can be taken for it. We trust that word because we believe that the utterer is in the position to know the truth of the matter. One can qualify for such a position in various ways: by being a recipient of a divine revelation, or by having special clairvoyant powers, or by having protected one's judgments from error by systematic study and wide experience. In religion the first type of authority ranks at the top, and for some people the second type seems highly trustworthy, but for most of us most of the time the third justification is the one in which we put our faith when our own knowledge is inadequate.

It is a curious fact that in matters of deepest concern to the human quest there is no agreement as to which of these authorities are valid or that any of them are. This skepticism is based on the wide diversity of values held by people at different times and places and by the authorities themselves. What are the consequences of this situation for the study of the humanities?

If there is no basis for any authority, then how are the studies to be chosen? The simplest answer is "At random" or "It doesn't make any difference." And the same answer would have to be made to the question as to who shall make the selection, for the pupil is as much an authority or nonauthority as his teacher. Indeed, if we are really to avoid authority there can be no selection at all, for nothing deserves to be included or omitted insofar as there is no standard for judging what "deserves" is to mean. In other words, any meaningful work in the

[7] An interesting summary of psychological studies on some of these aspects of art education is given by Dale Harris in "Aesthetic Awareness: A Psychologist's View," *Art Education,* XIX (1966), 17-23.

humanities entails the acceptance of some kind of authority as to what is *good* literature, *good* painting, etc.

About the only kind of authority that can be defended with any hope of acceptance is that of the expert, that is, the person who by systematic study and wide experience has developed a system of ideas by which he can give reasons for his imputations of artistic or moral merit and of human import. But what about the notorious lack of agreement even among the experts in these matters?

1. It must first be said that the disagreement is neither so violent nor so pervasive as is sometimes alleged. Actually the human quest is described with monotonous uniformity by experts to be the life of virtue, of reason, of love, of courage, of self-cultivation, of self-determination, of self-realization. Even the current dramatic "rebellions" against these verities is not a rejection of them but a protest against a culture that makes achievement of them difficult and perhaps impossible.

2. There is a large area of agreement in aesthetic matters so far as technical merit and the formal properties of a work are concerned.

3. Agreement is not a necessary condition for the possibility of expert authority. The greater the agreement, the greater confidence we can place on any expert, and this simplifies matters to be sure. However, the important difference is not between one expert and another, but rather between the expert and the nonexpert, or between enlightened cherishing and arbitrary cherishing.

4. Finally, not all authority is imposed and external; authority can be escaped by catching on to the rules by which the authorities make their judgment and by practicing the rules himself; or even by altering the rules for himself. If anything can put the individual on the road to becoming an incipient authority, it should be the humanities course.

Because there is disagreement among the experts, the schools in their selections of items to be studied are more or less constrained to pick items on which there is a good deal of expert agreement. Yet it would not be inconsistent with this principle to select deliberately items on which experts disagree, because educationally the inquiry into why the disagreement exists could be very rewarding indeed.

As to educators who inveigh against intellectualizing the arts, against indoctrinating children with standards that somebody does not hold, and who in this area, as in no other, insist on the freedom of the pupil to choose his own objects and standards, I would be more impressed by these arguments if they were more sincere or less naive. As a participant in a number of conferences and committees dealing with these matters,

I am convinced that the passion for pupil freedom is usually a symptom of insecurity about one's own preferences, and betrays a profound forgetfulness of the extent to which one's own preferences are based on expert authority. Even the passion for pupil freedom is more often than not learned from authoritative figures. One is hard put to know what to think about people who at one and the same committee meeting deny all objectivity to value judgment and in the next breath condemn television and the movies and popular music as inferior to what they happen to regard as "fresh, creative, and exciting."

A school system might therefore take considerable time to ask the proponents of a humanities course or a course in the combined arts to clarify the notion of authority for themselves and to each other. If the consensus is that about taste there is no disputing, it might be well to give up the course altogether, for there are many other resources in the community for forming just any old taste. If the cherishing is not to be enlightened, there is little point in devoting instructional time and resources to value education.

In value education it is probably true that, as C. S. Lewis pointed out, one must stand inside the Way or outside of it, and for those who stand outside of it the course in the humanities is bound to be misguided and even meaningless. What is the Way?

> It is the reality beyond all predicates, the abyss that was before the Creator Himself. It is Nature, it is the Way, the Road. It is the Way in which the universe goes on, the Way in which things everlastingly emerge, stilly and tranquilly, into space and time. It is also the Way which every man should tread in imitation of that cosmic and supercosmic progression, conforming all activities to that great exemplar . . . . This conception in all its forms, Platonic, Aristotelian, Stoic, Christian, and Oriental alike . . . is the doctrine of objective value, the belief that certain attitudes are really true, and others really false, to the kind of thing the universe is and the kind of things we are.[8]

It is only when educators believe that the rational powers of man enable him to understand the essence of man and that his will can shape his life accordingly that they can meaningfully search for that essence in what we call the humanities. We can continue the search even if we are not successful, but we cannot in simple honesty go on with it, if we do not believe that the search is itself meaningful.

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[8] *The Abolition of Man* (New York: Collier Books, 1962), pp. 28-29.

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